





THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

*Presidential Address*

1948

# VERSE TRANSLATION

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
TRANSLATION FROM LATIN

By

Professor Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson  
Hon. LL.D., Hon. Litt.D., Hon. Litt. et Phil.D.

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‘E però sappia ciascuno che nulla cosa per legame  
musaico armonizzata si può de la sua loquela in altra  
transmutare, senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza e armonia.  
E questa è la cagione per che Omero non si mutò di  
greco in latino, come l’altre scritture che avemo da loro.  
E questa è la cagione per che li versi del Salterio sono  
senza dolcezza di musica e d’armonia; chè essi furono  
transmutati d’ebreo in greco e di greco in latino, e ne la  
prima transmutazione tutta quella dolcezza venne meno.’

*Convivio*, I. vii.

‘And yet everyone knows,’ says Dante in the *Convivio*, ‘that  
nothing which is harmonized by the bond of the Muses can be  
changed from its own to another language without destroying  
all its sweetness and harmony. This is the reason why Homer  
was not translated from Greek into Latin as have other writings  
of theirs which we possess. This, too, is the reason why the  
verses of the Psalter are without the sweetness of music and  
harmony; for they were rendered from Hebrew into Greek, and  
from Greek into Latin, and in the very first change over all that  
sweetness disappeared.’



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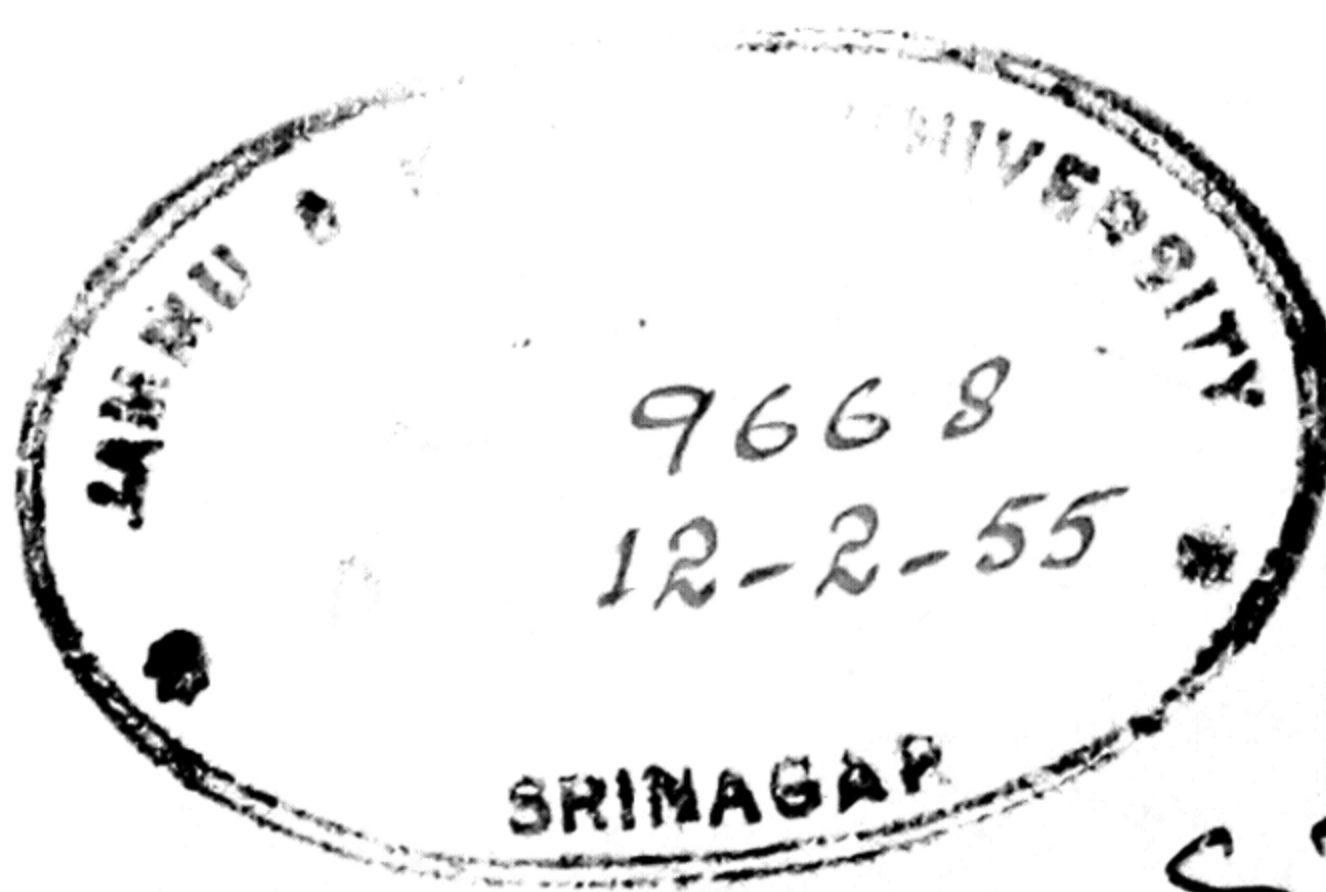
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## VERSE TRANSLATION

'CLEAR your mind of cant' was a piece of advice, an injunction, which Dr. Johnson was given to repeating. But there are shades and shades in cant. It may be found not so much in what you say as in the stress you lay upon it, with an implication that you are rather a superior person in asserting with emphasis so lofty a view. In a talk some time ago on the radio upon the debts we owed to translation exception was at once made of translation of verse which was waved aside as impossible. In a sense, I suppose, it is. But the statement carries a good deal with it, for it implies that one cannot *read* a poem in another language with full appreciation. To the best classical scholar our schools and universities can produce, the poetry of Virgil and Horace can never be what it was to those for whom the Greek or Latin tongue carried with it the associations of childhood, the intimacies of a lifetime. And even with a modern language, unless one has been as familiar from infancy with, say, French as with one's own tongue, there will be a difference between the reaction of a native and one who has acquired the language within the years of full consciousness. A tutor at Oxford used to say to me that the best classical poems of our scholars would, to a native, if one were revived from the dead, appear not unlike the Babu English poetry which some years ago afforded us amusement. Yet as a fact the corpus of English poetry includes a considerable amount of work which is fundamentally translated verse. The French poet, Eustace Deschamps, saluted Chaucer as 'Grant Translateur' on the score of his translation of the *Romance of the Rose*. Of that translation a portion has come down to us, but we know from the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* that it had included a version, not only of the more ideal treatment of the allegory of love by Guillaume de Lorris, but also of the more cynical, and very learned, conclusion by Jean de Meun:

Thou mayst it nat denye,  
For in pleyn text, it needeth nat to glose,  
Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose  
That is an heresye against my lawe.

But the *Romance of the Rose* does not complete the tale of Chaucer's translations. The two most elaborate of his tales, *Palamon and Arcite*, or *The Knight's Tale* as it became in the Canterbury collection, and the very remarkable poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, are both basically translations, but made in very different fashion the one from the other. Perhaps the best description of both would be, in terms borrowed from music, 'variations on a theme from Boccaccio'. But the



variations are of a very different kind one from the other. In *The Knight's Tale* an elaborate epic poem in the classical manner, with supernatural machinery and Homeric games, is converted into a straightforward, comparatively simple story much better suited to the incidents and the *personae*. In the other a dramatic story has its dramatic character subtly heightened and elaborated, the character of *Criseyde* so developed that two distinguished critics, the late Professor Legouis and the Harvard Professor Root, have taken diametrically opposite views of the heroine, the former regarding her as the innocent victim of the designs of her lecherous old uncle and of her pity, the invariable romantic preliminary to love, for her lover; while Root is convinced that she understands the whole business from the beginning and is a skilled hand at the game.\* Into all that I need not go, because my concern is with the poetry, of which there is abundance in both the tales, and some of it is fairly close translation. The piece of closest translation is the *Prohemium Tercii Libri*, the opening stanzas, which follow closely the song in the *Filostrato* sung by Troilus after he has won the love of *Criseyde*;

O blisful light, of which the bemes clere  
Adorneth al the thridde heven faire!  
O sonnes lief, O Joves doughter deere,  
Pleasance of love, O goodly debonaire,  
In gentil hertes ay redy to repaire!  
O veray cause of heele and of gladnesse,  
Iheryed be thy myght and thi goodnesse! . . .

Chaucer's translations are, in his poems, from French or Italian, and the genius of these languages, their syntax, especially as regards word order in the sentence, are sufficiently akin to make translation no insuperable task. It was different with Latin, and it is interesting to compare his success in the poems referred to and the laboriousness with which he endeavours, in the *Boethius*, for example, to reproduce the periodic structure of Latin prose.

Spenser's chief debt in verse translation is to French and Italian, Ariosto and Tasso taking the place of Boccaccio. Some of the loveliest stanzas in *The Faerie Queene* are renderings from Tasso. Will anyone deny the genuineness of the poetry in such stanzas as the following?

Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound,  
Of all that might delight a dainty ear,  
Such as attonce might not on living ground,  
Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:  
Right hard it was for wight that did it heare,  
To read what manner music that mote bee:  
For, all that pleasing is to living eare,  
Was there consorted in one harmonye,  
Birds, voyces, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.



The joyous birds, shrouded in cheareful shade,  
 Their notes unto the voyce attempered sweet;  
 Th'Angelicall soft trembling voyces made  
 To th'instrument divine respondence meet:  
 The silver sounding instruments did meet  
 With the base murmure of the water's fall:  
 The water's fall with difference discreet,  
 Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call:  
 The gentle warbling wind lowe answered to all.

The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;  
 Ah see, whoso faire thing doost faine to see,  
 In springing flowre the image of thy day;  
 Ah see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee  
 Doth first peepe forth with bashful modestie  
 That fayrer seemes the less yee see her may;  
 Lo, see soon after, how more bold and free  
 Her bared bosom she doth broad display;  
 Lo, see soone after, how she fades and falles away.

So passeth in the passing of a day,  
 Of mortal life the leafe, the bud, the flowre,  
 Ne more doth flourish after first decay,  
 That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre  
 Of many a Lady, and many a Paramoure:  
 Gather therefore the Rose whil'st yet is prime,  
 For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre;  
 Gather the Rose of love, whil'st yet is time,  
 Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime.

But the tendency after the Renaissance was to turn back from French and Italian to their remoter sources in Latin and Greek, though of Greek there was little first-hand knowledge. Most of the Greek classics were edited with Latin versions on the opposite page. Even Milton's knowledge of Greek was very limited. In editing the *Poems* of Milton some years ago I read the Latin and Greek poems with a better classical scholar than I am, the late Sir George Macdonald. He was rather shocked by Milton's few essays in Greek verse. In fact, the first English poet who was a really scholarly Grecian was Thomas Gray. But Latin influence on English poetry has a continuous history. In Latin the first popular poet was undoubtedly Ovid, but there is an interesting difference in their treatment of that poet between the medieval poets, taking Chaucer as example, and those of the Renaissance. For Chaucer Ovid was a store-house of good tales and a master of sentiment and manners. He is not to any appreciable extent a model for style. How much Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedium Amoris* were the source of medieval romantic love-sentiment not everyone realizes, despite the work of



Gaston Paris and other scholars. We are apt to fix our attention on the ideal side of courtly, romantic love, to think of Dante and Beatrice or, on a somewhat lower level, of Petrarch and Laura, or of the fidelity in adultery of Lancelot. But in fact courtly love was in great measure a pose. The courtly lover had the same end in view as Ovid's pupils:

It is by art ships sail the sea,  
It is by art the chariots move,  
If then unskilled in love you be,  
Come to my school and learn to love.  
In all the process of seduction  
This handbook gives you full instruction.

The French poets translated the *Ars Amatoria*, e.g. *Le Clef d'Amors*; and in fact the *Romance of the Rose*, the first part, is nothing more than an allegorical, abstract, courtly expansion of Ovid's doctrine of seduction, which is why Jean de Meun in the second part treats the whole doctrine and practice of courtly love in a vein of satire as sardonic and savage as that of Jonathan Swift.

Of course there are differences. Courtly love includes other elements that complicate and sometimes disguise the influence of Ovid, elements due to the different social conditions, racial and religious. Fidelity and Purity do rank higher as virtues with the medieval poet than with Ovid or the Roman poets generally. It is the Christian value attached to Purity that, in the story of the Grail, exalts Galahad above both Lancelot and Gawain. (It was not a valuation with which Chaucer had much sympathy.) But, leaving the subject of love, whether Love *par amours* or Love spiritual, as not my subject, it is as a romantic story-teller that Chaucer appreciates and uses Ovid. It may be that he took from Ovid his trick of sympathetic accompaniment, of interrupting the story with exclamations of sympathy, in which Keats was to follow Chaucer in his *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*. But Ovid's tricks of style were fortunately beyond him. Indeed it was by a comparison of Chaucer with Ovid that Dryden was to bring the influence of Ovid in English poetry to an end. Occasionally Chaucer does translate fairly closely, as in the story of Lucretia (which probably was read by Shakespeare), but generally he retells the story in his more homely, realistic, and humorous fashion. Compare his story of Ceyx and Halcyone in *The Boke of the Duchesse* with Ovid's version. Ovid tells how Juno sent Iris down to rouse Sleep and bid him send a dream to Halcyone. The light radiating from Juno rouses the sleeping god:

tardaque deus gravitate iacentes  
Vix oculos tollens, iterum iterumque relabens,  
Summaque percutiens nutanti pectora mento,  
Excussit tandem sibi se; cubitoque levatus,



Quid veniat (cognorat enim) scitatur. at illa:  
 Somne, quies rerum, placidissime Somne Deorum,  
 Pax animi, quem cura fugit; qui corda diurnis  
 Fessa ministeriis mulces, reparasque labori;  
 Somnia, quae veras aequant imitamine formas  
 Herculeae Trachinae iube, sub imagine regis  
 Halcyonen adeant, &c.

Chaucer gives us a dramatic, humorous little scene:

This messenger com fleyng faste  
 And cried: 'O, hoo! awak anon!'  
 Hit was for noght; there herde hym non.  
 'Awak!' quod he, 'whos ys't lyth there?'  
 And blew his horn ryght in her eere,  
 And cried 'Awaketh!' wonder hye.  
 This god of slep, with hys oon ye  
 Cast up, axed, 'Who clepeth ther?'  
 'Hyt am I,' quod this messenger.  
 'Juno bad thou shuldest goon'—  
 And tolde hym what he shulde doon  
 As I have told yow here-to-fore;  
 Hyt ys no nede reherse hyt more—  
 And went hys wey, whan he had sayd.

In the last three lines Chaucer evades Ovid's rhetoric in 'Somne, quies', &c., which Shakespeare was to translate in *Macbeth*:

Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,  
 The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
 Balm of hurt minds . . .

giving it poignant significance in the mouth of Macbeth creeping with blood-stained hands from the chamber of the murdered Duncan. But Chaucer avoids rhetoric. In the story of Lucretia and Tarquin Ovid exclaims:

Quid faciet? pugnet? vincetur femina pugna.  
 Clamet? et in dextra qui vetat ensis erat.  
 Effugiat? positus urgentur pectora palmis;  
 Tunc primum externa pectora tecta manu.

Chaucer rejects the rhetorical antitheses:

What shal she sayn? her wit is al ago.  
 Right as a wolf that fyt a lamb alone  
 To whom shal she complain or mak a mone?  
 What shal she fight with an hardy knight?  
 Wel wot man that a woman hath no might.  
 What shal she cry, or how shal she asterte  
 That hath her by the throte with swerd at heart?



It was at the Renaissance that Ovid's poetic rhetoric found ardent imitators among English poets, and none more so than Shakespeare. The young men from the universities, Marlowe, Lyly, Peele, Greene, Daniel, and those such as Shakespeare who were drawn into their company and came under their influence, were all intoxicated by the joy of beautiful words, musical rhythms, tropes and antitheses; and, like young ladies when they first begin to take an interest in their dress, and have the management of their own allowance, they a little overdid the passion for what Wordsworth calls 'bracelets and miniature-pictures and hair-devices', whatever be the fashion of the day. Of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and the *Rape of Lucrece*, one must say that they are radically bad poems though none but a man of genius could have composed them. If Ovid could have come back to life in London in the year 1595 and read these two poems he would have felt very much as a lady of Paris might if in the South Sea Islands she met a native who had studied *Vogue* or some other dress paper. *Venus and Adonis*, as we know, is put together from Ovid's story of the same (*Metamorphoses*, x), combined with borrowings from the stories of Salmacis' wanton appeal to the coy and passionless youth, Hermaphroditus; while the boar is described in the language which Ovid uses of the Calydonian boar killed by Meleager, which echoes the Latin poem with signal fidelity—echoes it, I would say, with an intensified reverberation. The *Rape of Lucrece*, in the same way, is elaborated from the story as told in the *Fasti*, and a comparison of the two affords an interesting study of Shakespeare's youthful art. He elaborates and embroiders in the most fantastic fashion. Six lines in Ovid's poem tell us how Tarquin was received by Lucretia, how he retired at night, and how he rose to achieve his purpose:

Quantum animi erroris inest! parat inscia rerum  
 Infelix epulas hostibus illa suis.  
 Functus erat dapibus: poscunt sua tempora somnum.  
 Nox erat; et tota lumina nulla domo.  
 Surgit, et auratum vagina deripit ensem;  
 Et venit in thalamos, nupta pudica, tuos.

Shakespeare expands that into forty stanzas—which, you will say, surely makes a difference. Yes; but the devices by which he does this are just those which Ovid himself uses to tell the story of Myrrha and of others in the *Metamorphoses*, and partly in this story too—exclamations, rhetorical speeches or dialogues, antitheses, conceits. The result is a bad narrative poem considered as such. None of the Elizabethans can compare with Chaucer in the art of story-telling in verse. The Elizabethans are too intent on stylistic decoration, and Shakespeare's adornments are often in very bad taste—conceited



rhetoric, antithetic points not only improbable but in their setting shocking and repellent. But we do not tend to dwell on them critically, and at times Shakespeare rises far above Ovid. His thought is juster, his rhetoric sincerer, for example, to take one passage, the verses on Opportunity (*Lucrece*, cxxvi–cxlvi).

But it is not in the narrative poems alone of this period that Ovid's influence is apparent. He dominates the two greatest sequences or collections of love-poems—Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and John Donne's *Songs* and *Elegies*. But that influence is shown in very diverse ways. Nothing could be more unlike the texture of Ovid's style than that of Donne: 'for the elegancy, facility and golden cadence of poesy, *caret*. Ovidius Naso was the man, and why indeed *Naso* but for the smelling out the odoriferous flowers of fancy, the jerks of invention.' Donne was capable of jerks of invention—very jerky jerks, but not of 'elegancy, facility and golden cadence'. What drew Donne to Ovid was, in contradistinction to the wire-drawn idealism of Petrarchan poetry, Ovid's frank and daring sensuousness. He borrows from the *Amores* and from the *Ars Amatoria* in his own harsh, coarse, and passionate elegies; and sometimes Ovid's thoughts are reproduced in a very strange setting. In one of his most Petrarchan and even Platonic poems Donne exclaims:

First we lov'd well and faithfully,  
 Yet knew not what wee lov'd nor why,  
 Difference of sex no more wee knew,  
 Then our Guardian Angel's doe;  
 Coming and going, wee  
 Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales;  
 Our hands ne'r toucht the seales,  
 Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free:  
 These miracles wee did; but now alas,  
 All measure, and all language, I should passe,  
 Should I tell what a miracle shee was.

The thought:

Our hands ne'r toucht, . . .

derives from Ovid's story of Myrrha:

Felices quibus ista licent! humana malignas  
 Cura dedit leges, et quod natura remittit  
 Invida iura negant.

*Met.* x. 229 ff.

Shakespeare's love-poetry is very different from that of Donne. Donne lays little stress, for a lover, on personal beauty; nor does he echo the Renaissance note of the fleetingness of beauty. For Donne, as for Dante, and perhaps Petrarch, influenced partly by Plato, partly by Christian feeling, love has in it always some mysterious



earnest of immortality. Shakespeare in the *Sonnets* is obsessed by the thought of the transitoriness of all things that exist. In the reiteration of this thought, as Sir Sidney Lee pointed out, Shakespeare has drawn freely on Ovid's Pythagorean discourse on the changeable changelessness, the revolution, of all things. All I would add is that his verse seems to my ear to echo, not the rough and uncouth translation of Golding, but the facility and golden cadence of Ovid's Latin:

sed ut unda impellitur unda,  
Urgeturque eadem veniens urguetque priorem,  
Tempora sic fugiunt pariter, pariterque sequuntur,  
Et nova sunt semper:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
Each changing place with that which went before,  
In sequent toil all forward do contend.

That is surely a closer echo of the Latin than Golding's laboured

As every wave drives others forth, and that that comes behind  
Both thrusteth and is thrust himself; even so the times by kind  
Do fly and follow both at once and evermore renew.

But I must not follow this theme farther. Sufficient to say that if, as Arnold declared, 'Elizabethan literature is steeped in fantasy to the lips', it is equally true to say that it is steeped in Ovid to the lips. Even the young Milton knew and loved Ovid, witness his own Latin poems.

'At first sight', says Mackail, 'no two poets could seem less alike. But if one reads the *Metamorphoses* with an eye on *Paradise Lost*, the intellectual resemblance is evident, in the manner of treatment of thought and language, as well as in the general structure of their rhetoric, in the lapses of taste and obstinate puerilities ("non ignoravit vitia sua sed amavit" might be said of Milton also) which come from time to time in their maturest work.'

The end of Ovid's dominant influence on the English poets is marked by Dryden's famous comparison of Ovid with Chaucer in the *Preface to the Fables* (1699). Yet Dryden translated considerable portions of Ovid, and confesses to a fondness for his poetry:

'Whether it be the partiality of an Old Man to his Youngest Child, I know not: But they [his renderings of Ovid] appear to me the best of all my Endeavours in this kind. Perhaps this Poet is more easie to be Translated than some others, whom I have lately attempted: Perhaps too, he was more according to my Genius. He is certainly more palatable to the Reader, than any of the *Roman Wits*, though some of them are more lofty, some more Instructive, and others more Correct. He had Learning enough to make him equal with the best. But as his Verse came easily, he wanted the toyle of Application to amend it. He is often luxuriant both



in his Fancy and Expressions, and . . . not always Natural. If Wit be pleasantry, he has it to excess; but if it be propriety, *Lucretius*, *Horace*, and, above all, *Virgil* are his Superiours.✓

Dryden's own wit had needed much curbing, and his temperament drew him to poets who were both vehement and witty. He preferred Juvenal to Horace, and hints somewhere that he might have succeeded better in translation with Homer than with Virgil. But despite Dryden's *Virgil* and Pope's *Homer* the poet whom our classical age took most to heart was Horace, the mundane, philosophic, exquisite Horace. Virgil has always been *princeps poetarum*, but he was too great an artist to influence the medievals or the poets of the Renaissance, except the greatest of them, Dante and Milton.

There are, of course, two Horaces, the Horace of the *Odes* and the poet of the *Satires* and *Epistles*. On the *Odes* I shall not venture to speak. I do not think that the genius of our language admits of the condensation which is the characteristic of the *Odes*. Prior is perhaps the most Horatian of our poets, but a little too Anacreontic. Does one really admire Milton's one attempt, or Gladstone's? My own favourite translator is Sir Stephen de Vere, who frankly abandoned any attempt at condensation and took Gray's *Odes* as his model. The important Horace for English poetry is the Horace of the *Epistles* and *Satires*, the Horace who

with graceful negligence  
And, without method, talks us into sense,  
Will, like a friend, familiarly convey  
The truest notions in the easiest way.

Pope indicates here one of the qualities that attracted himself and others, the poetry which is poetry and yet is also easy conversation. Horace has defined it himself:

Primum ego me illorum, dederim quibus esse poeta,  
Excerptam numero: neque enim concludere verum  
Dixeris esse satis, neque si qui scribat uti nos  
Sermoni propiora, putes hunc esse poetam.  
Ingenium cui sit, cui mens divinior atque os  
Magna sonaturum, des nominis huius honorem.

*Satire I, 4, 39-44.*

'First I must strike my name from the list of those whom I shall count to be poets. For you must not call it enough to make a verse scan, nor give the name of poet while he writes as I do in the style of common talk. Who has the native gift, who has the inspired soul and tongue of lofty utterance, to him you may give the honour of that name.'

This was the idea which appealed to the age of sense and politeness, moderation and good form, just as Ovid's luxuriance of fancy



and wit had appealed to the young university wits of a century earlier. But the age of Pope was not the first to admire, or endeavour to imitate, Horace. Even among the Elizabethans there were poets who took Horace for their model rather than Ovid, and wrote satires and epistles. Ben Jonson loved to call himself 'Horace'; and Donne was the most Horatian of the Elizabethan satirists. But the attempt to imitate Horace issued in some rather quaint productions. Donne's *Satires* are by no means to be despised, yet they give one the feeling that Lucilius has come after and not before Horace. The longest of Donne's *Satires*, the fourth, is obviously suggested by Horace's

Ibam forte via sacra, &c.,

Sat. I, 9, 1.

but instead of a bore trying to get from Horace an introduction to the influential Maecenas, Donne's bore is clearly a spy endeavouring to detect and denounce a Catholic; and, brilliant as Donne's wit is, he could not catch the easy-flowing, though conversational, style of Horace. The time had not yet come.

Dryden prepared the way, but our first Horace was Pope. He set himself to imitate Horace in his later *Satires*. The result is not altogether happy. 'Between Roman images', says Dr. Johnson, 'and English manners there will be an irreconcilable dissimilitude, and the works will be generally uncouth and party-coloured; neither original nor translated, neither ancient nor modern.' In one respect indeed Pope excels Horace, if it be an excellence. He is a wittier and more venomous satirist. It is very amusing to compare his rendering of the first satire of the second book with the original. Where Horace is complimentary, sincerely so, Pope's satire is all the more effective that it is veiled. Further, he gets in generally about three stabs for each one of Horace's. Horace, you will remember, consults Trebatius: 'There are those who think I am too fierce in my satire and carry things beyond lawful bounds. The other half of the world thinks all my compositions nerveless, and that verses as good as mine may be spun a thousand a day.' So Horace; now Pope:

There are (I scarce can think it but am told)  
There are to whom my satire seems too bold:  
Scarce to wise Peter complaisant enough,  
And something said of Chartres much too rough.  
The lines are weak, another's pleas'd to say,  
Lord Fanny spins a thousand such a day.

*Imitations of Horace, Satire, I, 1-6.*

Horace has mentioned no individual person. Pope gives a passing stab to wise Peter Walters and Fr. Chartres, and then impales his old foe Lord Hervey, the Sporus of the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*. Again:



'Take a holiday,' says Trebatius to Horace.

'Not write verse at all, you mean?'

'I do.'

'The best advice after all—may I be hanged if it isn't! But I cannot sleep.'

So Horace again; and now hear Pope:

F. I'd write no more.

P. Not write? but then I think.

I nod in company, I wake at night,  
Fools rush into my head, and then I write.

Even Horace's compliments are turned to satire by Pope: Horace is recommended (I need not quote the passage at length) to sing the praises of Augustus if he must write, but declares that that is a strain above him, and that any slip would mean trouble: 'If you try to stroke him awkwardly he is on guard in every direction and his heels are ready.' In Pope every word becomes satire of Whig poets, and of a court indifferent to literature (as the English Court has been ever since Charles II).

F. Or if you needs must write, write Caesar's praise,  
You'll gain at least a knighthood and the bays.

P. What! like Sir Richard, rumbling, rough and fierce,  
With Arms and George and Brunswick crowd the verse;  
Rend with tremendous sound your ears asunder  
With gun, drum, trumpet, blunderbuss and thunder?  
Or nobly wild, with Budgell's fire and force,  
Paint angels trembling round a falling horse?

F. Then all your Muse's softer art display,  
Let Carolina smooth the tuneful lay,  
Lull with Amelia's liquid name the Nine,  
And sweetly flow through all the Royal line.

P. Alas! few verses touch their nicer ear;  
They scarce can bear their Laureate twice a year;  
And justly Caesar scorns the poet's lays—  
It is to history he trusts for praise.

So again Pope applies ironically Horace's praise of Augustus to George II in his imitation of the first epistle of the second book, *To Augustus*:

While you, great patron of mankind! sustain  
The balanced world and open all the main;  
Your country, chief, in arms abroad defend;  
At home with morals, arts, and laws amend;  
How shall the Muse, from such a monarch, steal  
An hour, and not defraud the public weal?



Yet Pope is not a Horace. In the first place, he has no sincerely held and interesting philosophy to direct and control his satire. Horace's *Satires* and still more the *Epistles* have held their place in the esteem of generations not merely by their art, but by their genuine wisdom and charm, thought and feeling. Horace's 'Carpe diem' is not an Epicurean maxim in our sense of the word 'Epicurean'. It is a lesson in moderation, taking pleasure in simple things and sitting light to the things of this world which death will soon take away:

Non es avarus: abi, &c.

*Ep.* ii. 2, 205-16.

'You are no miser—excellent! Well, have all the other vices fled with that one? Is your breast free of empty ambition? Is it void of fear and anger in the face of death? Do you smile at dreams, the terrors of magic, witches, ghosts of the night, Thessalian portents? Do you count your birthdays with gratitude? Do you make allowance for your friends? Do you become gentler and better as old age draws on? What relief is it to pluck out one thorn among many? If you do not know how to live aright make way for those who have the skill. . . . It is time for you to quit the scene; lest when you have drunk more than your fair share, you be laughed at and driven away by an age to which play is more becoming.'

Pope is too sustainedly brilliant and oratorical, even when he translates Horace closely, as in the lines beginning:

What! armed for virtue when I point the pen,  
Brand the bold front of shameless, guilty men;  
Dash the proud gamester in his gilded car;  
Bare the mean heart that lurks beneath a star;  
Can there be wanting, to defend her cause,  
Lights of the Church, or Guardians of the Laws?  
Could pensioned Boileau lash, in honest strain,  
Flatterers and bigots even in Louis' reign?  
Could laureate Dryden pimp and friar engage,  
Yet neither Charles nor James be in a rage,  
And I not strip the gilding off a knave,  
Unplaced, unpensioned, no man's heir or slave?  
I will, or perish in the generous cause.  
Hear this and tremble! you, who scape the laws:  
Yes, while I live, no rich or noble knave  
Shall walk the world, in credit, to his grave.  
To virtue only and her friends, a friend:  
The world beside may murmur, or commend.  
Know, all the distant din that world can keep,  
Rolls o'er my grotto, and but soothes my sleep.  
There my retreat the best companions grace,  
Chiefs out of war and statesmen out of place, . . .

*Imitations of Horace, Satire, I, 105-32.*



or his rendering of Horace's description of the good poet in the Second Epistle of the Second Book:

At qui legitimum cupiet fecisse poema, &c.,  
*Epistolae*, II, 2, 109 ff.

the original of Pope's:

But how severely with themselves proceed  
 The men who write such verse as we can read!  
 Their own strict judges, not a word they spare,  
 That wants or force, or light, or weight, or care,  
 Howe'er unwillingly it quits the place,  
 Nay, though at Court (perhaps) it may find grace;  
 Such they'll degrade; and sometimes in its stead  
 In downright charity revive the dead;

Or bid the new be English, ages hence,  
 (For use will father what's begot by sense),  
 Pour the full tide of eloquence along,  
 Serenely pure and yet divinely strong,  
 Rich with the treasures of each foreign tongue;  
 Prune the luxuriant, the uncouth refine,  
 But show no mercy to an empty line;  
 Then polish all, with so much life and ease,  
 You think 'tis nature, and a knack to please:  
 But ease in writing flows from art not chance;  
 As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

*Imitations of Horace*, II, 2, 157-79.

Indeed I venture to think that the finest product of the spirit and art of Horace in our poetry is neither Prior nor Pope, but that Christian Horace as one might call him, William Cowper. He was, of course, a far better classical scholar than Pope, a product of Westminster School, strangely and regrettably not a university man. He wrote elegant verses, and the critical principles he lays down in his letters are all in the spirit of Horace's criticism: 'To touch and retouch is, though some writers boast of negligence and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies, the secret of almost all good writing especially in verse. I am never weary of it myself.' Cowper's first English poems were didactic satires, for each of which he chose a motto from Horace or Virgil, and to my ear and mind, despite the wide interval which separates Evangelical piety from Roman Epicureanism, Cowper's satires are more Horatian than Pope's. He is more of a gentleman than Pope, urbane and sympathetic despite his alarming creed. He has, like Horace, a philosophy in which he really believes and wishes to inculcate, and though it is not Horace's creed yet it has some by-products which recall Horace—a love of retirement and the country, and a certain gentle Epicureanism, a taste, if not for Falernian wine and 'the tangles of Neæra's



hair', yet for tea, and the talk of lively and sympathetic ladies. Lastly, Cowper's diction and verse come much nearer to that conversational, natural, easy, polite, humorous style which is Horace's ideal in the *Sermones*.

'I never will believe!' the colonel cries,  
 'The sanguinary schemes that some devise,  
 Who make the good Creator on their plan  
 A being of less equity than man.  
 If appetite, or what divines call lust,  
 Which men comply with, e'en because they must,  
 Be punished with perdition, who is pure?  
 Then theirs, no doubt, as well as mine, is sure.  
 If sentence of eternal pain belong  
 To every sudden slip and transient wrong,  
 Then Heaven enjoins the fallible and frail  
 A hopeless task, and damns them if they fail.  
 My creed (whatever some creed-makers mean  
 By Athanasian nonsense, or Nicene),  
 My creed is, He is safe who does his best,  
 And death's a doom sufficient for the rest.'  
 'Right,' says an ensign, 'and for aught I see,  
 Your faith and mine substantially agree;  
 The best of every man's performance here  
 Is to discharge the duties of his sphere,' &c.

*Hope.*

Even in his shorter lyrical pieces I venture to think that Cowper has more of the essential Horace than Prior. Prior is more airy, more Anacreontic. But Horace is not Anacreon. His lighter odes give to a careful reader an impression of solidity of thought and feeling as well as of a finished art. 'Ludentis speciem dabit—' but it is not so light and flippant as it appears. Well, Cowper manages no such difficult metres as Horace. His style is less clear and shining, his diction occasionally a little dulled by the dust of eighteenth-century conventions and poetic diction. But in his best short poems Cowper gets the essential qualities—compression, no words are wasted; suggestion, more thought and feeling are suggested than fully elaborated. There is no expansiveness of heart: how simply he expresses what was in him a profoundly tragic conviction. He is addressing Newton:

That ocean you of late surveyed,  
 Those rocks I too have seen,  
 But I afflicted and dismayed,  
 You tranquil and serene.  
 You from the flood-controlling steep  
 Saw stretched before your view,  
 With conscious joy, the threatening deep,  
 No longer such to you.



To me the waves, that ceaseless broke  
Upon the dangerous coast,  
Hoarsely and ominously spoke  
Of all my treasure lost.

Your sea of troubles you have past,  
And found the peaceful shore;  
I tempest-tossed, and wrecked at last,  
Come home to port no more.

Think how that would have been expressed, had the mood been theirs, by one of the Romantics, e.g. Shelley, in the spirit of the closing stanzas of *Adonais*; and add to the above Cowper's *The Castaway*:

I therefore purpose not, or dream  
Descanting on his fate,  
To give the melancholy theme  
A more enduring date;  
But misery still delights to trace  
It's semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allay'd,  
No light propitious shone;  
When, snatched from all effective aid,  
We perished, each alone:  
But I beneath a rougher sea  
And whelm'd in deeper gulphs than he.

7 Cowper translated Homer, but of that, as of Pope's version, I do not intend to say much. It has been fully dealt with by Matthew Arnold. One insuperable obstacle to the verse translation of Homer is the fact that, to my mind, we have not really succeeded in naturalizing the hexameter, as, for example, we naturalized the Italian *ottava rima*, so completely that to Swinburne it seemed that we had made it our own rather than an Italian measure. And how much the verse loses when the hexameter is converted into our decasyllabics.

But if Ovid was the favourite Latin poet of early centuries, and Horace of our classical eighteenth century, with the Romantic Revival and the nineteenth century Virgil resumed his pre-eminence challenged only by the Greeks. I can remember a short time when comparison with Homer brought on Virgil an unnecessary amount of critical censure, almost contempt. But the great Virgil is not the Latin Homer, the poet of battles. It is the Virgil of especially the second, fourth, and sixth books, and that is the Virgil whose influence in English poetry has been so profound that it is easy to overlook it. Milton, of course, knew his Virgil, and commentators have no difficulty in pointing out borrowings. Yet Ovid was Milton's favourite Latin poet, and in *Paradise Lost* the influence of Virgil was blended with that of the Greeks—Homer and the tragedians, and



also with that of the Hebrew Prophets. For Milton's spirit was *not* Virgilian. *Pietas* was not the first and last of virtues for Milton—that was liberty, independence of thought and feeling. He had no respect for traditional thought, feeling, or ritual. It was enough for him that the Catholic Christian Church had held this or that doctrine for him to challenge it. 'John Milton to all the Churches', so he heads the *De Doctrina*; and all the conclusions he there reaches are drawn from his own reading of, for him, the one and only source of Christian thought, the Bible. But Milton was a great poet and could not but appreciate Virgil's art. Where he seems to me to come closest to Virgil is just in those rare passages where a note of tenderness enters:

Others more mild  
Retreated in a silent valley, sing  
With notes angelical to many a harp  
Their own heroic deeds and hapless fall  
By doom of battle; and complain that Fate  
Free virtue should enthrall to Force or Chance.  
Their song was partial, but the harmony  
(What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)  
Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment  
The thronging audience, &c. *P.L.* II. 546–55.

which is a reminiscence of Virgil's

Quin ipsae stupuere domus atque intima Leti  
Tartara, caeruleosque implexae crinibus angues  
Eumenides, tenuitque inhians tria Cerberus ora,  
Atque Ixionii vento rota constitit orbis—

*Georgics*, iv. 481 ff.

lines which Landor translated so beautifully at the age of nineteen.

But to my mind the most genuine disciples and lovers of Virgil were the greatest spiritual poet of the century, Wordsworth, and the two finest artists, Keats and Tennyson. Keats had read Virgil repeatedly at school and Virgilian influence is traceable in all his work. Is not the famous line in *Isabella*:—

So the two brothers and their *murdered* man  
Rode past fair Florence

a more or less conscious echo of

Illa quidem, dum te fugeret per flumina praeceps,  
Immanem ante pedes hydram *moritura* puella  
Servantem ripas alta non vidit in herba?

*Georgics*, iv. 957–9.

The epithet *moritura* is almost as boldly anticipative as the *murdered* of Keats. Warde Fowler claimed Tennyson as the most Virgilian of our poets and so, in respect of subtle and elaborate art, he may be. *To Virgil* is one of the noblest poems he ever wrote:—



Chanter of the Pollio glorying  
 in the blissful years again to be,  
 Singer of the sunless meadow,  
 unlaborious earth and oarless sea,  
 Thou that seest Universal  
 Nature moved by universal mind,  
 Thou majestic in thy sadness  
 at the doubtful doom of human kind.

But the poet who comes closest in spirit to Virgil is not Tennyson but Wordsworth. Wordsworth, we now know, translated early much of *Virgil*, and towards the end of his best period as a poet he composed two poems which the unerring insight of Lamb at once recognized as both excellent and something altogether new in Wordsworth's poetry: *Laodamia* and *Dion*. '*Laodamia* is a very original poem; I mean original with reference to your own manner. You have nothing like it. I should have seen it in a strange place, and greatly admired it, but not suspected its derivation' (Lamb). They were the fruit of Wordsworth's re-reading of Virgil while preparing his son for the university. But the affinity of the two poets goes deeper than either translation or deliberate imitation. Virgil and Wordsworth were both poets of *pietas* in an age of revolution and Napoleonic egoism—of *pietas* as Warde Fowler defined it, 'the sense of duty to family and state and to the deities which protect them'.

'The pious man believes in a destiny transcending his own will: to exalt every passion, however innocent, above this is a rebellion; to intensify any passion so as to disturb the appropriate calm of resignation is to act irreverently against the Gods. Lesser duties must give way to the greater; love of wife must give way to love of country; and the sorrow of bereavement must not obscure the larger issues of life.'

Wordsworth's *Prelude* is a history of the development of his soul from an instinctive trust in the goodness of nature and the natural impulses of our own nature, through a period of disillusionment and intellectual conflict, to a recovery of his faith in nature chastened and deepened. The *Aeneid*, we are told, is the history of the growth of the hero in self-control and *pietas*. Wordsworth learned his reverence, his *pietas*, from intercourse with Nature, from the early experience of the beauty, the sublimity, the ethical significance, of the great processes of Nature, when he looked back on these after the struggle to find in philosophy, in Godwin, a new ethical and political philosophy. But there came a time when this sense of the glory and sublimity of Nature faded and the question arose what was to take the place of these early intuitions:

But yet I know, where'er I go  
 That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth.



Mr. Garrod would have it that Wordsworth failed in this ode and in the *Ode to Duty* to vindicate a life no longer visited by these visionary gleams. I venture to think that he was mistaken. As a poet Wordsworth mourned the loss of these early impressions. Every poet must regret the loss of the freshness of early impressions. But as a man and a poet Wordsworth saw quite well that it was not the end, that one cannot always live in the glory of what might be called a spiritual conversion. To feel the claim of duty as a natural and beautiful impulse is good on occasion. To look back and see that one has done so is a help, but we cannot *live* in such moments:

Serene *will* be our days and bright  
When love is an unerring light  
And joy its own security, &c.

To Wordsworth, Mr. Garrod declares, duty is a second best; we seek support from that power when higher and freer powers fail. Well, duty is a second best compared with the ideal state in which our duty will be our delight. Aristotle also will tell us that. But of that ideal state we have, if at all, only glimpses. The man who passes through such an experience as a conversion, such, for example, as is described in Masefield's poem, whatever be its exact significance, a conversion, a spiritual awakening, will make a great mistake if he thinks he is always to live in this state of ecstasy. Such moments are like Christian's vision from the Hill Clear, given to strengthen him for the journey. Wordsworth's misfortune was that his poetic power did flag, and yet he *would* try to write in the old way and on his first inspiring themes—Nature and the Peasantry. There is little gained by a too exclusive interest in the lives of simple people. We cannot undo the work of civilization and become all of us peasants and working men. That was Wordsworth's delusion, and that of Tolstoi also. Wordsworth should, like Virgil, have gone on to write of those who carried into the higher tasks of life, the more complex conditions of civilization, the same courage and piety. He should have written his *Aeneid* or *De Rerum Natura*. *The Excursion* is too much a duller recast of the *Prelude*. But Virgil came to the help of the English poet and inspired *Laodamia* and *Dion*, poems Wordsworthian to the core and yet also Virgilian in spirit and not altogether unworthy of Virgil in style and verse:

He spake of love, such love as Spirits feel  
In worlds whose course is equable and pure;  
No fears to beat away—no strife to heal—  
The past unsighed for, and the future sure;  
Spake of heroic arts in graver mood  
Reviv'd, with finer harmony pursued;



Of all that is most beauteous—imaged there  
In happier beauty; more pellucid streams,  
An ampler ether, a diviner air,  
The fields invested with purpureal gleams;  
Climes which the sun who sheds the brightest day  
Earth knows, is all unworthy to survey.

If one turns from Latin or a modern language to Greek does one find anything like the same phenomenon, not mere translation but what springs from translation or the thought of it, a variation on the theme of the original poem? Not at any rate, I think, to the same extent, and one reason is that it is more easy to play such variations on the work of a lesser than of a great poet, on Ovid more easily than on Virgil, on Virgil than on Homer. Of course a great poet, like Milton, will make what use he chooses of another poet's work and yet retain his own independence. In style and verse, and to some extent in sentiment, Milton is indebted to Virgil, yet to me the genius of Milton seems more akin to that of Homer. The sentiment and poetry of Virgil makes more appeal to the reader than his characters and action. Milton's sentiment is too narrowly orthodox, despite his somewhat disguised heretical beliefs, his Arianism. But in all the greatest books the characters and action have in a high measure the same kind of interest as the heroes and action of the *Iliad*—Satan, Beelzebub, Moloch, Belial, and, to save the position, at least Abdiel. Milton is more a poet of character and action than a poet of sentiment.

But to return to my proper theme, there were two works of a very different kind, that readers were not content to accept in a translation that did not go beyond Latin—the New Testament and the poems of Homer. Into the history of the translation of the former from Greek I need not go here. Swinburne maintained that the translation turned canine Greek into divine English. The translation of Homer and its possible influence is a more interesting question, or one at least requiring more examination. Two translations of Homer have secured themselves a place in English literature—Chapman's and Pope's. The latter became for some two centuries a classic. To Dr. Johnson it seemed one of the greatest works of the kind ever produced: 'The train of my disquisition has now conducted me to that poetical wonder, the translation of the *Iliad*; a performance which no age or nation can pretend to equal.' To Johnson indeed Pope's version appeared at times superior to the original: 'I suppose many readers of the English *Iliad*, when they have been touched with some unexpected beauty of the lighter kind, have tried to enjoy it in the original, where alas! it was not to be found. Homer doubtless owes to his translator many Ovidian graces not exactly suitable to his character; but to have added can be no



great crime if nothing be taken away. Elegance is surely to be desired if it be not gained at the expense of dignity. A hero would wish to be loved as well as to be revered.' For Coleridge it had become 'that astonishing product of matchless talent and ingenuity'. Did anything come out of it, any variation obviously inspired by the work of Pope? I do not think so, except it be what was not altogether an advantage for English poetry. To Pope's *Homer* Coleridge attributes in the main the diction which Wordsworth was to christen 'pseudo-poetic diction'. No; if anything came out of the increasing study of Greek in the century which is a permanent contribution to our literature it is the Pindaric Odes of Thomas Gray.

4 On the whole, I think one may say, the poet of original and genuine inspiration will seldom be content with what is just translation. It is the poet who, with perhaps an easy command of the technique of poetry, style and versification, feels no particular drive to express himself either as the poet-prophet such as Milton or Shelley, or the poet-artist for whom the form itself is an inspiration, as Robert Bridges confesses it was for him, who will find an outlet in verse translation. An example is the late Andrew Lang, one of the most gifted of men. It was, we know, a disappointment to him that his poem, *Helen of Troy*, aroused no great interest. Yet the reason seems to me pretty clear. In a sermon I listened to at St. Andrews after his death it was claimed that nothing had come from his pen which might not be read by woman or child—you know the kind of pulpit eulogy. But that may indicate some defect as well as a virtue. It did confirm me in the opinion I had formed of what was wanting in his *Helen of Troy*. It was an achievement, but not of a kind I myself admire, to write of one of the passionate women of poetry and leave out the passion, to make her the innocent victim of the goddess. Is that to do her justice? One recalls the verses of Swinburne on the historians who had spent much labour and zeal in the vindication of the character of Mary Queen of Scots:

Strange love they have given you, love disloyal,  
 Who mock with praise your name,  
 To leave a head so rare and royal  
 Too low for praise or blame.

You could not love nor hate, they tell us,  
 You had nor sense nor sting:  
 In God's name then what plague befell us  
 To fight for such a thing?

Some gifts the gods will give to fether  
 Man's highest intent:  
 But surely you were something better  
 Than innocent!



No maid that strays with steps unwary  
Through snares unseen,  
But one to live and die for; Mary  
The Queen.

But if Lang was no great original poet he was an exquisite translator in verse of poetry, classical and modern, Greek, Latin, and French. He, too, experimented on what I have described as variations on a theme, calling his verses of that kind 'Ghosts' as Calverley, I think, called his of the same sort 'Echoes'. But many are genuine translations and very happy renderings they are, for example:

*Bion*

The wail of Moschus on the mountains crying  
The Muses heard, and loved it long ago;  
They heard the hollows of the hills replying,  
They heard the weeping water's overflow;  
They winged the sacred strain—the song undying,  
The song that all about the world must go—  
Where poets for a poet dead are sighing,  
The minstrels for a minstrel friend laid low.  
And dirge to dirge that answers, and the weeping  
For Adonais by the summer sea;  
The plaints for Lycidas and Thyrsis (sleeping  
Far from the 'forest ground called Thessaly');  
These hold thy memory, Bion, in their keeping,  
And are but echoes of the moan for thee.

It was the same with myself, if I may close on a personal note. Like many another young lover of poetry I wished to be a poet myself. For poetry, as a young man, a baker, said to me when I was, like others, lecturing to soldiers in the first World War, 'is a thing that you discover you like'. I wrote accordingly a good deal of verse, but never felt quite sure that I had the central requirement, the irresistible desire to say what was in one's heart. That impression was finally intensified when, on leaving school for the university, I met a genuine poet and learned how it went with him. He did not sit down to compose a poem trusting to find what to say. He would set out for the day's work and never arrive there because on the way he was seized by something he must say, and say in verse, though there was much to be done before he had said it as he wished. He wrote because he must, not because he wished to write poetry. What corresponded to that in my mind was that a poem by another so took possession of me that I could not rest till I had made it to some extent my own by translation. I remember how on the occasion of my first visit to Holland, when I had undertaken to write a volume on the European literature of the early seventeenth century for Professor



Saintsbury, and had learned from, I think, the late Professor Oliver Elton that this was perhaps the one period in which the literature of the Low Countries had achieved a reputation, had indeed influenced German literature, a Dutch professor to whom I brought an introduction read me the poem of Vondel on the death of his little daughter. I was so possessed by it that I spent the following day roaming round the docks turning the Dutch into English in the metre of the original.

Quite naturally, I think, I went on to attempt other poems of that period by Hooft, Vondel, and Huyghens. Much later I made the acquaintance, indeed gained the friendship, of the most eminent poet of the day, the last representative of a second period of interest in the same literature, the eighties and nineties of last century. That was the late P. C. Boutens. I heard with great regret of his death during 1947. One poem of his appealed to me with the same suddenness and completeness, a description of the periods of a single day seen through the eyes of a pair of lovers, at least so I interpreted the poem:

*Love's Hour*

P. C. BOUTENS

'What hour o' the day may it be?'

The pale dawn opens like a rose;

The breast-deep meadow, where no mower yet mows,

Stands yellow and white with hanging flowers dew-weighted;

The silver stream, a clean-swept highway, flows

Far to the horizon's milky blue;

And morning's singing heart, the skylark, throws,

From throat intoxicated,

Wise words wherewith the heart unwitting glows,

Joy that no measure knows,

Joy that seems ever new . . .

'What hour o' the day may it be?'

Love's hour for thee and me.

'What hour o' the day may it be?'

The sun draws nigh the summit of his stair;

And in an ocean of light-saturate air

The cornfield smoulders under glowing gold;

The sickle glitters in the dry, ripe grain;

The shadow shrinks into the wood's dark hold;

O'er water-course or in the sky

No cloud goes by;

Only the moon's transparency

Moves ghost-like in the blue unpastured wold . . .

'What hour o' the day may it be?'

Love's hour for thee and me.



‘What hour o’ the day may it be?’  
 ’Tis Evening; in her russet gold  
 Grows fair and old  
 The world’s day-lit gaudy face;  
 A shower of light falls from the heavens apace;  
 The voices of the winds awake again;  
 The last wain staggers to the old barn door;  
 Grey headstones glimmer on the darkling moor;  
 Above the shining wall  
 Of the western clouds, in the green of heaven’s plain,  
 Suddenly the Evening-star lets fall  
 Her rays tender and pure . . .  
 ‘What hour o’ the day may it be?’  
 Love’s hour for thee and me.

As I have said, I came to know him intimately and I got into the habit of getting him to read a poem with me and make quite clear the meaning of every line and phrase, and then I set myself to render it to the best of my ability, some of them rather elaborate poems as *The Morning Nightingale*, and later another even more elaborate poem: *The Christ-Child*.

Through Boutens I was introduced to the work of more recent poets, especially Dr. Jan Hendrik Leopold, and attempted two poems of a very different kind from those of Boutens: ΟΙΝΟΥ ΕΝΑ ΣΤΑΛΑΓΜΟΝ; and another which was recently printed in the periodical called *Translation: Cheops*.<sup>1</sup> In all my attempts of the kind, and I fancy this is the experience of others, two things seemed to me true: it needs happy moments for this task, that is one; the other is Aristotle’s saying that Art and Chance are closely akin. A mere printer’s mistake improved a poem by Malherbe when the line ‘Rosette a vécu ce que vivent les roses’ became ‘Rose, elle a vécu, &c.’ By a somewhat similar chance I once, for a casual collection of poems and articles, attempted a sonnet, *The Flute*, by the French Parnassian poet Heredia which has had the fortune first to please myself, and so far to please others that, with and without application to me, it has been reprinted more than once here and on the other side of the Atlantic.

I have come to one or two conclusions. One is, as I have said, that there is always in success an element of chance if also of laborious work. The other is that one is wise to be content with this or that poem which has taken possession of one for the time. A complete translation of the works of this or that poet is a tremendous and perilous risk. I might add a third. A somewhat elaborate poem is more easy to translate, with at least the appearance of success, than one whose charm is its simplicity. Transferred to another tongue

<sup>1</sup> These and some other translations I hope to issue privately through the Samson Press, Woodstock, Oxford.



simplicity is too apt to become banality. Who has really achieved success with Heine? It was, I think, a happy thought of Sir Alexander Gray to choose the Scottish dialect (it might have been another dialect, Barnes's, for example) because dialect carries with it an immediate suggestion of simplicity, the rural minstrel, the kind of poetry which wanders through local papers but which a Burns suddenly exalts by the inspiration of genius and a passionate temperament.

*Wie kannst du ruhig schlafen*

Hoo can you sleep sae saftly  
Afore I'm in my grave?  
The auld rage comes upon me—  
I'll be nae mair your slave!

D'you mind the auld, auld ballant,  
Hoo ance when the nicht was mirk,  
A deid lad cam for his lover  
To sleep wi' him i' the kirk.

My bonnie, winsome lassie,  
Forget me, gin you daur;  
I live, and am no sae feckless  
As a' the deid fowk are.

With an elaborate poem one may, sometimes with success, take liberties, find another image than the poet's which in your tongue conveys the impression of the original, may even intensify the original effect. If translation is, as has been affirmed, impossible, it is equally certain that it is impossible not at times to be tempted to defy the statement and try. J. Russell Lowell declared that Coleridge's translations of the *Piccolomini* and *Death of Wallenstein* were superior to Schiller's original tragedies. One cannot, after all, rule out verse translation, remembering what English poetry owes to the attempt from Chaucer's *Troilus* to Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam*.



PRINTED IN  
GREAT BRITAIN  
AT THE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS  
OXFORD  
BY  
CHARLES BATEY  
PRINTER  
TO THE  
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Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Oxford, by Charles Batey  
and published by Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press,  
Amen House, London, E.C. 4



